

# Police officer builds trust in Chinatown

By Ed Levitt  
The Tribune TR 1 NOV 25 1988

The youthful police officer walks the streets of Oakland's Chinatown followed by strangers who stop and talk to him.

They usually converse in Chinese.

The officer also conducts regular meetings with Chinese community leaders — again the words are spoken in Chinese.

"I act as sort of a liaison officer between the Oakland police

## EASTBAY PEOPLE

and the Chinese community. I make friends for the police," says officer Harry Hu, 32, born and raised in Hong Kong.

The people of Oakland's Chinatown and Harry Hu feel comfortable together. He has gained their respect and earned their confidence. In return he tries to assure their safety.

The combination has made the man from Hong Kong one of Oakland's most honored officers.

Oakland Deputy Police Chief Thomas Donohue points to the Medal of Merit Hu earned this year from the Oakland police.

"The award usually is given for heroism," Donohue explains. "But Hu won it for consistently outstanding performances in the Chinese community, much of it on his own time."

Hu was honored again last month as Officer of the Year, this time by the Grand Lake Kiwanis Club for his work in the Chinese community.

One member of that community praised Hu for "helping hundreds of Chinese people. He speaks their language. They look for him. They ask for his advice. He's been a fine influence in the neighborhood. Even the kids respect him," says Bill Louie, who has operated a service station at 8th and Franklin for 37 years.

"A few years ago a jewelry store in Chinatown was robbed," Louie went on. "Well, Harry talked to a teenage Asian gang, found out who robbed the jeweler and cracked the case."

Hu also can be strict with residents and merchants of Chinatown, he points out.

"You jaywalk and he will give you a ticket," Bill Louie says.

Hu has worked the Chinatown beat since 1985. He asked for it.

"I did it," he says, "because I saw a need for the Asian community to acquire a better understanding of the police. Many are recent arrivals to this country. They don't know how law enforcement operates in the U.S.

"They feel leery of calling the police even after being victimized by a crime. They think nothing will be done. Besides, they face a language problem."

But now, encouraged by Hu, some are coming forward. "They're beginning to feel we're on their side," he says.

"Several offer information if trouble is brewing. They also call me if they notice unusual or unsavory activities in the area."

Hu has helped break up Asian gangs that have intimidated Chinese merchants.

Because of his and the efforts of other Asian officers, Oakland shows fewer Asian gang problems than other cities, according to Deputy Chief Donohue.

"Gangs don't come around while I'm on duty," says Hu, who often returns on his own time to see a contact, identify a suspect or spread his good will.

For some Chinatown youngsters, Hu acts as a role model. "These kids tell me they want to be police officers. Others tell me they prefer to join gangs. I try to steer them away from the gangs.

"But Oakland's Chinatown is no worse than other areas. Gangs represent just one problem. I don't try to harass them. I just

have to show up. Just my presence, just being so visible, seems to deter the bad element."

That's why Hu prefers working foot patrol to vehicle patrol. "A foot patrol officer is the one who gets face-to-face contact with the citizens."

"I like to meet the people. I attend about six meetings a month with community leaders of Chinatown."

"I also talk at day-care centers, senior-citizen homes and adult-education facilities. I zero in on crime prevention. I touch on reporting crimes and going to court to put the bad guys behind bars. I say it all in Cantonese."

He also spends two hours every Tuesday morning at the Chinese Community Center, 310 8th Street.

"It's another way to meet the public and try to eliminate their fears," he says.

Hu came to the United States from Hong Kong in 1974. He earned his citizenship five years later — "on the same afternoon I applied to get on the Oakland police force. That was my happiest day."

He says, "I dreamed of being a cop when I was a kid. I finally made it in 1981."

In 1987, Hu was named Officer of the Year by the Northern California Asian Police Officers Association.

"What I like best about being a policeman," Hu says, "is knowing I can help people."

# OPD honors 4 officers on the beat

MON MAR 23 1987

By Harry Harris  
*The Tribune*

Four Oakland police officers, who among them helped solve at least three murders and hundreds of robberies last year, have been honored by the department.

Officers Manny Aquino, Ian Haney, Harry Hu and Clint Ojala received special plaques from the department's Criminal Investigation Division at a ceremony Friday night.

The awards were started last year to honor patrol officers, the "backbone" of the Police Department, said homicide Sgt. John Vargas, who helped institute the program.

Vargas said the "majority of crimes are solved" as the result of the work of patrol officers.

Added Sgt. John McKenna, who nominated Aquino for his award, "patrol officers are the real nucleus of police work. Their sources of information make them invaluable."

Aquino, 39, who walks a beat in the city's Fruitvale District,

was commended for his work in solving two homicides last year.

In one, the stabbing death of a man last August, Aquino had just a nickname and a tip that the suspect had a relative in the Fruitvale area. He was able to provide the assailant's name to McKenna within one day.

In another, the deliberate drug overdose of another man in September, Aquino was able to identify two suspects within a day based on "meager" physical de-

scriptions.

Haney, 36, who has probably the best network of informants in the department, obtained the identities of suspects in a December shooting death at an East Oakland housing project.

Ojala and Hu, although singled out for specific cases, are credited by robbery investigators with helping to solve hundreds of robberies during their careers.

Ojala, 27, through informants, located and arrested a man re-

sponsible for 11 bank robberies, said Sgt. Greg Karczewski who nominated him for his award. Cited for his "tenacity and diligence," Ojala also arrested a man responsible for a Grand Avenue restaurant robbery that had eluded other officers for a month.

Hu, 30, was commended for the integral role he played in the arrests of 12 Asian gang members for numerous robberies, extortions and weapons charges.

# New police program targets Asians

*Centers where cops speak the language opening in Oakland*

MON FEB 9 1987

By Harry Harris  
*The Tribune*

When Oakland Police Officer Harry Hu emigrated as a teenager from Hong Kong to the Bay Area in 1974 he was apprehensive, spoke no English and would have been grateful for a place where he could learn, in his native language, about the criminal justice system of his adopted country.

Now, Hu, 30, is excited and proud to be able to staff such an information center, believed to be one of the first of its kind in the United States.

The Oakland Police Department is opening three such centers today in different parts of the city where Asians, particularly those from Indochina, have settled. Many of the immigrants have been targeted as victims of crimes and some have balked at going to the authorities.

One of the new centers will be at the Laotian Buddhist Temple, 1745 12th St., where a formal dedication is to be held today at 1 p.m. Representatives of the U.S. Department of Justice are expected to attend the ceremony. They have expressed interest in using Oakland's program as a nationwide model.

The other two locations are: The Oakland Chinese Community Council, 310 Eighth St., and a site at the rear of 1909 E. 14th St., now shared by Cambodian New Generation Inc. and the East Bay Vietnamese Association.

Oakland Deputy Chief of Police Tom Donohue, whose idea it was to open the information offices, said the primary purpose is not only to address crime problems but also to bridge the cultural and language difficulties confronting local public



Police Officer Robert Sayaphupha, left, Deputy Chief of Police Thomas Donohue and Officer Harry Hu.

agencies and the growing Asian community.

About 22,000 Indochinese call Oakland home, the majority of them having arrived in the past few years. That includes 13,000 Vietnamese and Chinese Vietnamese, 4,000 Cambodians and at least 3,250 Laotians. There are about twice as many Chinese residents.

Donohue, who chairs the Asian Advisory Committee on Crime established by the Police Department and the Public Safety Committee of the Oakland City Council, said the centers will provide many different services.

The sites will be staffed by bilingual police officers for a few hours a day on a rotating basis and by volunteers from various community groups.

He said the officers will be able to take crime reports, provide information about what the person can expect after the report is taken, and refer people to other public agencies as needed.

Citizen volunteers, he said, cannot take crime reports but will be able to refer people to the proper section of the Police Department or any other agency.

Eventually, crime prevention

literature in Asian languages will be available and the centers will also have televisions and VCRs that will show tapes in the different languages about what they can expect from the criminal justice system.

Donohue said all of the materials, equipment and office space costs are being donated.

The program has the full support of local Asian community leaders as well as social, professional and fraternal Asian organizations, he added.

Officer Robert Sayaphupha, a

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24-year-old native of Laos, will alternate between the 12th Street and East 14th Street sites. He said people visiting the centers will be more at ease and trusting because "they don't feel like they have to talk to any high authority."

Hu, who will be working out of the Chinese Community Council office, said he expects to be able to accomplish a lot because the people he helps will realize that "behind that uniform is a real person who can speak their native language and make them feel more comfortable.

"Lots of new immigrants feel closer to you when you can speak their native tongue. They open up more to you."

Lai Van Luu, executive director of the East Bay Vietnamese Association, is looking forward to the opening of the centers.

He said traditionally Vietnamese people will not report what they consider a small or minor problem like a disturbance or petty crime. "But in this country if we don't report something small it might become a bigger problem in the future.

"We want to work with (officials) as much as we can to share the burden of what is happening to our people," he said.

# Police target gang in Chinatown

WED SEP 18 1991

By Harry Harris  
Tribune staff writer

Authorities have thwarted the largest, most organized attempt by a violent Asian triad gang to extort merchants' money and "take over" Oakland's Chinatown, police investigators said yesterday.

More than a dozen "foot soldiers" of the Wo Hop To Triad, a nearly century-

old criminal organization based in Hong Kong, were detained by police yesterday and Sunday after they demanded Chinatown businesses begin paying \$50 a week for protection, investigators said.

"It was the first time such a large attempt at extortion has been tried," said Sgt. Harry Hu of the Oakland police gang task force. "It's never been so

blatant or so organized."

In May 1989 police arrested six members linked to the same triad for trying to extort money from Chinatown merchants. Police seized assault weapons and handguns from the suspects.

"There's a high potential for violence; they don't care what they have to do. They have access to all kinds of weapons," said one law enforcement

# extortion scheme

official.

Law enforcement sources said the Wo Hop To triad has at least 300 "hard-core members" in the Bay Area, with 100 or more in Oakland.

Most are Chinese who were born in Vietnam and first surfaced in the Bay Area five years ago, police sources said.

Relying on murder and kidnapping,

Wo Hop To members recently wrested control of extortion and other criminal rackets from the Wah Ching in San Francisco's Chinatown, sources said. The battle sparked a bloody turf war that has seen more than a half-dozen gang members in both groups murdered.

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Elsewhere in the United States and Canada, officials say, Hong Kong triads are fighting to establish footholds in anticipation of the 1997 communist takeover of the island colony. Law enforcement officials say the triads are fearful the hard-line communist government will brutally crack down on their illegal activities.

In New York City, triad gangs have engaged in extortion, armed robbery and large-scale heroin smuggling as they battle for control of criminal activities in the burgeoning Chinese communities of Queens and Brooklyn, officials said.

"There are no norms anymore. No rules, no values," Ko Lin Chin, a New York sociologist studying the triad subculture there, has said.

In Oakland, investigators credited improving trust and cooperation between the Asian community and police — mainly through the city's Asian Advisory Committee on Crime — with helping stop the triad's plans in Oakland before they gained a substantial foothold.

Police said most of the more than a dozen merchants approached by the triad immediately called police to report the extortion attempts.

Hu said merchants told police that on Sunday afternoon dozens of younger triad members, ranging in age from 15 to 19, began distributing fliers in Chinatown promoting concerts in Lake Tahoe and San Francisco.

Hu said the triad was trying "to create visibility" for gang members and intimidate merchants by showing how many people they could mobilize on the streets.

After the fliers were distributed, older triad members approached merchants, including restaurant owners, grocers and beauticians.

They identified themselves as members of a tong, a traditional Chinese business society, that actually was a front for the triad, Hu said.

The gang members then told the merchants they were "taking over Chinatown" and demanded \$50 a week in protection money,

Hu said.

Triads usually ask much more in extortion money — \$125 to \$200 a week — and Hu said he believes the gang members were asking a smaller amount "to get their foot in the door."

If the merchants refused to pay, they were threatened with physical harm and having their businesses vandalized, Hu said.

As soon as the extorters left, merchants began calling police. One of the first to respond was Officer Jim Burns, whose suspicions were aroused earlier in the day by the large number of people passing out fliers.

He and other officers then detained more than a dozen of the flier distributors, who were questioned by members of the gang task force.

The suspects were released because police could not prove they had committed a crime, but

Hu said the police crackdown "will probably stop" the triad's attempt to take over Chinatown.

But he cautioned that if the gang members sense the police pressure is being lifted, "they probably will come back."

Two more gang members returned to Chinatown last night and again demanded money from merchants, police said. The two were detained by officers, who also went door-to-door informing merchants what to do if they were approached by extortionists.

Police gang task force commander Lt. Larry Eade said the police department is committed to making sure the police crackdown continues.

"We will make sure they (merchants) get the police response needed to make the community safe," Eade said. "We will not tolerate members of our

business communities being held hostage by anyone."

Pharmacist Albert Wong, president of the Chinatown Chamber of Commerce, said merchants would be meeting this week to see what more needs to be done and how to prevent extortion attempts in the future.

He said merchants would like to see more police foot patrols in Chinatown.

Wong was not approached by the extortionists, but he said he was surprised at how large the group was and at their boldness. He says he believes the extortion attempt were made because the triad "maybe thought we were easy prey" and because they also felt there was little police presence.

— Tribune staff writers Robert J. Lopez and Paul Grabowicz contributed to this report.

# Agencies join forces to fight Asian gangs

SUN SEP 22 1991  
By Harry Harris  
and Paul Grabowicz  
Tribune staff writers

Local and federal law enforcement agencies, responding to the influx of triads into the Bay Area, are setting up special anti-Asian gang task forces that could rival the efforts of the 1960s to crack down on the Mafia.

Oakland police are planning to double the size of the department's special gang task force and have formed an alliance with Chinese merchants and community leaders through the city's Asian Advisory Committee on Crime.

Police credit the cooperation of merchants with their success this week in thwarting the Wo Hop To triad's attempt to set up a huge extortion racket in Oakland's Chinatown.

When young gangsters affiliated with the Hong Kong-based triad first appeared on Chinatown streets last Sunday, merchants immediately called police, who then rounded up a dozen gang members.

"(The triads) don't expect merchants and property owners to resist their efforts. They are not used to a coalition of police and the community working together to stop them," Oakland Deputy Chief of Police Tom Donohue said.

"That's taken them by surprise," Donohue said.

"If they (the triads) come back, I will call police again," vowed one Chinatown merchant.

"I'm glad (the police) stopped them before they got any money," said another shop owner. "Chinatown here has been quiet and police have been doing OK, but they need more officers here."

In Emeryville, where the triads have tried to take over legal gambling parlors, police have assigned two officers to keep a watch on the clubs.

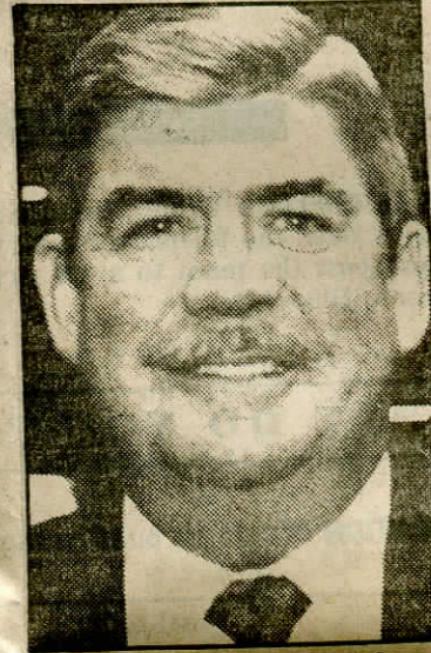
Emeryville and Oakland police also work closely with a 16-member gang task force San Francisco police established 14 years ago.

On the federal level, the organized crime strike forces set up in the 1960s to break up the Mafia are now focusing on combating the triads as well, authorities said.

"These are structured, organized groups that are engaged in criminal activity in

the Bay Area. They represent a much bigger problem than groups that are just organized spontaneously, and they have to be dealt with," said Assistant U.S. Attorney Geoffrey Anderson, chief of the San Francisco strike force.

The FBI, the Drug Enforcement Administration, the IRS, the Immigration and Naturalization Service and



**Deputy Chief Tom Donohue**  
*Gangs were surprised*

the U.S. Customs Service are all involved in the efforts to blunt the triads.

Bud Covert, senior assistant special agent in charge of the FBI's San Francisco office, said his agency has "increased our work with the Royal Hong Kong Police," which have the world's most extensive files on the triads.

Donohue said Oakland police have access to a nationwide computer tracking system for known Asian gang members.

The head of Oakland's gang task force, Sgt. Harry Hu, is a native of Hong Kong, speaks several Chinese dialects and has worked the streets of Oakland's Chinatown for six years.

Donohue said gang task force members regularly brief beat officers in Chinatown on what the triads are doing and what suspicious activity to look for.

He said it is critical that law enforcement agencies work together because gang members "are not limited by territory."

"As far as they are concerned Oakland, San Francisco and Emeryville are one big town," Donohue said.